

To the Members of the California State Senate:

I fully support efforts to improve and ensure compliance with the federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). Congress enacted ICWA in 1978 to protect the best interests of Indian children and promote the security and stability of Indian families and tribes, by establishing minimum federal standards that must be followed when the removal of Indian children from their families becomes necessary. ICWA is important in helping to preserve the heritages of Indian children and maintain connections with their tribes. It is essential that children know who they are and remain connected with their families whenever possible.

However, I am concerned with the ability of the California Department of Social Services and counties to fully implement a piece of legislation that is this complex by January 1, 2007. It is my understanding that the parties negotiating the bill agreed upon an effective date for the bill of July 1, 2007, although the final version of the bill inadvertently failed to provide that implementation timeframe. It also is my understanding that the author is submitting a letter to the Senate Daily Journal to clarify her understanding that implementation will likely require a longer time frame than the bill would otherwise provide.

I am signing Senate Bill 678 with the understanding that state and county agencies be given sufficient time to ensure full and appropriate implementation of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Arnold Schwarzenegger